
From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, August 2, 2006

CONTACT: Dan Tapper, 509-6259
324-9862 (Cell)

**BYSIEWICZ, BLUMENTHAL JOIN WITH FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT TO ASSURE ALL MILITARY ABSENTEE
BALLOTS ARE COUNTED IN PRIMARY**

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz and Attorney General Richard Blumenthal today announced they are joining with United States Department of Justice in an agreement to ensure that every absentee ballot cast by members of the military stationed overseas for the August 8th primary is recorded and counted, regardless of when the ballots arrive in Connecticut.

By law, any member of the military who voted by absentee ballot through the use of a federal postcard application in the 2004 elections should have automatically received a ballot for the federal races in the 2006 primaries from their local Town Clerk's office. However, the Department of Justice informed Secretary Bysiewicz and Attorney General Blumenthal earlier this week that a number of towns still didn't send the ballots out until late July, and as a result several hundred members of the military are in danger of not having their votes counted on August 8th because their ballots may not arrive by then.

Beginning in May, Secretary Bysiewicz's office sent four different letters to Connecticut Town Clerks reminding them of this law and to make sure the necessary absentee ballot forms were sent out to military members stationed overseas. However, as many as seventy-five towns still did not send the ballots out prior to late July, which raised the possibility of those ballots not arriving home by August 8th and not being counted. The late mailings by these town clerks led to an agreement filed today in federal court in Hartford seeking to keep the elections open until every late vote is counted, in the event of a close race.

"I have no statutory authority to hold elections open beyond 8 p.m. on August 8th to assure that these ballots are all counted. In the event that late-arriving military absentee ballots could change the outcome of the elections, I am joining with the Department of Justice in their efforts to keep the primary open through August 25th," Secretary Bysiewicz said. "I am committed to assuring that every ballot cast by overseas servicemen and women will be counted."

"Our brave men and women serving in the armed forces must not be disenfranchised from the voting process just because they received their ballots too late," Secretary Bysiewicz added. "I fully support the actions of the federal government today and am happy to join with them."

"Joint federal and state action will assure that our military on battlefields abroad can vote absentee just as in town halls at home," Attorney General Blumenthal said. "On the biggest base or smallest outpost, our servicemen and women should receive absentee ballots as a right – without having to ask. While they defend our freedoms, and democratic rights, they should have every benefit of democracy, and more. Keeping faith with our military men and women means counting their votes. Our agreement will guarantee that every service member can vote and that their votes count.

"The number of military absentee ballots mailed late – about 700 out of a total of 700,000 registered Democrats statewide – is relatively small, but any one submitted before August 25 will be counted in the final results. If the margin of victory is less than about 700 or the number mailed late, declaration of the winner will be delayed until August 25 under our agreement, so that they may determine the outcome. We can learn from our experience with military absentee ballots in the primary to avoid these pitfalls in the general election by making sure that all ballots are sent no later than 45 days before Election Day," Attorney General Blumenthal added. "This issue should also remind us about the need to keep faith with our military men and women who serve and sacrifice to preserve democracy – while they are serving and afterward – in providing adequate health care, education, job opportunities and other benefits of democracy."

There are two federal primaries scheduled for August 8th; the Democratic race between Senator Joseph Lieberman and challenger Ned Lamont for U.S. Senate, and the Republican race between Scott MacLean and Miriam Masullo in the First Congressional District.

#####